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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses intergovernmental relationships between education service agencies (ESAs) in Pennsylvania and the agencies they serve, namely, the state department of education and local school districts. Some suggestions made are that ESA policies retain flexibility and that local control be retained in ESA programs, for example, through local school board members becoming members of the ESA board of directors. In addition, ESAs should maintain independence from state departments of education in order to respond more appropriately to local school district needs. A position paper attached at the end of the document describes the relationship between the Pennsylvania state department of education and its intermediate units. (Author/ID)

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EMERGING GOVERNANCE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCIES STATE EDUCATION AGENCIES AND LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT-THE PENNSYLVANIA PICTURE

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AASA
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I would like to confine my remarks this afternoon to four basic areas. I would first like to make some general comments in regard to intergovernmental relationships within the education sector. I believe that these particular comments will be applicable to both relationships with the State Education Agency and local school districts. I would then like to spend sometime discussing emerging governance relationships with local school districts and follow that with a discussion of emerging governance relationships with State Education Agencies as I see them happening in the state of Pennsylvania, and from what I have been able to learn, in other states across the country. I am going to close by summarizing some future trends that I think will automatically result from the changes I believe are happening with SEAs and local school districts at the present time.

GENERAL COMMENTS CONCERNING EMERGING GOVERNANCE RELATIONSHIPS IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

One thing I think is crucially important in discussing any inter-governmental relationships is the axiom that no matter what is written on paper, the key to any positive inter-governmental activity is the ability of the people involved to communicate effectively. Inter-personal relationships, important to any organization, are of particular importance to an educational service agency because of our need to interact with so many diverse types of governance structures.

While positive personal contacts are important to an ESA, also of great importance is the legislation that establishes the educational service agencies. Legislation sets the framework for the kind of inter-governmental relationships that can exist by law. As an example, if the legislation structuring ESAs sets up state control of the selection of the chief executive officer of the service agency, it would be very hard for that service agency to strike an independent posture from the SEA, even though

an independent position might, at times, be crucial to its future as far as relationships with local school districts are concerned.

I believe it is also important to emphasize that ESAs and other branches of the educational governance bureaucracy should not spend an inordinate amount of time structuring formal policies and written guidelines as to what sort of inter-governmental relationships should exist. The role of an effective ESA is to "walk the middle". Policies or guidelines written in concrete can greatly hinder the ability of any service agency to do the job that it is expected to accomplish. Formally adopted policies that limit the flexibility of a service agency to respond to state or local needs can be a roadblock to success.

Another general concept that I think is of great importance is the fact that the source of funding and the budget approval process can often dictate the type of governance relationships that must exist. If an ESA is totally a "tin cup" operation, it may be very difficult for that ESA to take an independent stance on an issue, when at times an independent stance might be necessary to exert appropriate leadership. Sometimes, however, a small source of funding can appear to play an inordinate role in determining policies of an educational service agency. A good example of this exists in Pennsylvania where, on a direct basis, only a small amount of an intermediate unit's funding comes from the local school districts. The local school districts, however, play the key role in determining the program of services provided by an I.U. The budget approval process for the funds that are contributed by the local school district is so cumbersome and complex, that most of us in the intermediate units in Pennsylvania find ourselves so deeply involved in this budget approval process that we have a tendency to forget that the direct local school district contributions, in most cases, probably aren't ten percent of our total budget. I guess this shows where the pressure comes from in Pennsylvania.

GOVERNANCE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

I believe that one of the keys to the future of ESAs will be our ability to appropriately handle the shrinking enrollment and resources problems that are being faced by local school districts. It is difficult

for an ESA to handle this situation effectively because it seems to be a natural phenomena that as local school districts resources shrink, intermediate unit programs, of necessity, seem to grow. It is easy for ESA representatives to understand why this happens, but it is not always easy to explain this concept to local school district administrators and board members. It also can be a problem for local school board members who sit on an ESA Board to be consistently facing shrinking decisions at the local level, and at the same time, being forced to make growth decisions at the ESA. Our ability to handle this apparent shrinking/growing contradiction will continue to put to be put to a severe test during the next several years.

Another test we will face has to do with the concept of local control, which is not a dead issue, at least in Pennsylvania. Educational service agencies will be assuming even greater responsibilities in the future, I believe, and it will be of great importance that we allow for as much local input as possible into these new programmatic thrusts. Again, this will not be an easy task to handle. Many of the new responsibilities we have recently received or will be receiving in the future are of a psuedo/regulatory nature. Our ability to effectively assume these new responsibilities in a manner acceptable to local school districts is very important.

Because of some of the concepts mentioned above, I feel it has become increasingly important that local school board members be members of the ESA Board of Directors. In this manner, we will be able to have an inside track on explaining these types of changes to at least one local school district board member and, therefore, we should have an automatic contact with all local school board members. It is also, I believe, increasingly important that local school district superintendents expand their role as the key motivator behind ESA program development. In addition, another growing, and I think continuously emerging governance responsibility, has to do with the formation of advisory councils for each ESA program area. I believe it may be possible to evaluate the effectiveness of an individual ESA by checking on how many advisory councils are in operation. It seems to me that the more we have, the better our contacts will be with local school districts, automatically increasing our ability to respond to their needs. I, as one educational service agency chief executive officer, would rather get advised to death than shot in the back.

EMERGING GOVERNANCE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE STATE EDUCATION AGENCY

I believe that because of the need for more local school district involvement in the governance of ESAs, it is important that ESA's are able to maintain a degree of independence from the State Education Agency. Without this ability, it will remain difficult for an ESA to respond appropriately to local school district needs, even if one of those needs is simply to provide a forum for local school officials to cathart about the actions of the State Educatic.. Agency. Pennsylvania Intermediate Units have been able to maintain a degree of independence from the SEA, and, frankly, I think this has been of benefit to both the SEA and the ESA. I would guess, however, that several PDE staff see us as having too much independence.

In turn, one of the responsibilities faced by the Chief Executive Officer of an Education Service Agency to do his or her best to make certain that local school district officials understand that an effective ESA also has the responsibility of serving the state. This is something that is often not understood at the local district level. I believe that requests to serve the state will continue to grow and a viable ESA must be prepared to respond without destroying the relationships with its constituent local school districts.

One of the emerging governance problems will be the need for SEA personnel to acquire an understanding of the ESA concept. It seems to me that there are times when some SEA staff members request certain things from an ESA that they would avoid if they truly had an understanding of the ESA concept and the roles we must play. There are SEA officials that have yet to learn the difference between the words "cooperate" and "capitulate", and it's probably our responsibility to provide either formal or informal staff development activities to assist in this needed growth in understanding.

From a practical standpoint, it seems to me that SEA financial support of ESA programs will continue to increase in proportion to other sources of funds. I include in this SEA support, federal money which flows through the SEA to the Educational Service Agencies, because many times SEA policies and procedures can dictate the recepient of federal funds. So SEA support of ESAs is crucial to their very existence and something at which ESA officials can hardly look askance.

In the past several months, the Pennsylvania Association of Intermediate Units and the Pennsylvania Department of Education have considered and adopted a position paper spelling out PDE and intermediate unit relationships. Because this particular position paper hits the topic under discussion right on the head, I would like to review it with you at this time. I want to give full credit to the development of this paper to PAIU President, Dr. Lloyd Ruoss, Executive Director of the Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit, who first developed a paper of this type a few years ago which eventually led to adoption.

January 5, 1979

Position Paper

PDE/IU RELATIONSHIP

In approaching the task of defining the relationship between Pennsylvania's twenty-nine Intermediate Units and the State Department of Education, one must first attempt to determine whether the Intermediate Unit, as it was formulated and now exists, is a state or locally controlled organization. This issue has been a topic of debate over the last decade while the Intermediate Units were being formed and is still a question that is raised from time to time. There is little doubt that the initial planners viewed the Intermediate Units as a local organization. The state plan for Intermediate Units published by the State Board in 1967 states that the Intermediate Unit will provide, "consultative, advisory, or education program services to school districts." The responsibility for administration, supervision, and program operation belongs to school districts." Approximately nine years later, the most comprehensive study of Intermediate Units to date published by the Joint Legislative and Finance Committee stated..."the Intermediate Units remain at this time generally independent of 'state control' in their policies and activities." This, then, should put to rest the debate and establish the Intermediate Units in Pennsylvania as locally controlled organizations.

What then should be the relationship between the Pennsylvania State Department of Education and the Intermediate Units?

Legally, the Directors of Intermediate Unit Boards, as well as the Chief Executive Officer of each Intermediate Unit, are state officers bound to carry out the laws and regulations of state government. However, our attempt is to define relationships between the Department of Education and the Intermediate Units. This goes beyond the school code, regulations and standards under which we all operate and deals with the day to day workings between large organizations and the many personalities which are involved.

A. The distribution of any information to, or the collection of information from, school districts by Intermediate Units should be requested only when approved by the Special Assistant for Intermediate Units and/or the Commissioner for Basic Education. The Commissioner may confer with the executive committee of the Pennsylvania Association of Intermediate Units when he deems it appropriate.

B. Meetings or conferences at which PDE Staff explain, interpret or gain support for state programs or policies represent a service to school districts. With the assistance of the Intermediate Units involved such meetings should be encouraged.

C. The use of Intermediate Unit staff as disseminators or trainers of local school district staff in such state programs as long-range planning, quality assessment and curriculum projects is supported. Involvement in such projects should be presented by the PDE to the Executive Directors at their monthly meetings and should gain their approval. PDE personnel are advised to involve Intermediate Unit staff in the initial planning stages and to seek their advice on how the Intermediate Units can best provide the linkage between the PDE and local school districts.

D. The Association of Intermediate Units is encouraged to establish standing committees for each of the seven basic services described in Act 102. The chairperson of each committee should be an Executive Director. The PDE could then work with the appropriate committee prior to a presentation to the Association.

E. Intermediate Units now serve as local educational agencies for the administration of statewide projects. This is a matter of negotiation between the PDE and the appropriate Intermediate Unit Board and staff.

F. While Intermediate Units are clearly involved as an administrative agency in the programming for exceptional children, PDE and Intermediate Unit staff must constantly be aware that the Intermediate Unit's basic function is to serve as a service agency to school districts; thus keeping administrative functions to a minimum.

G. PDE staff are encouraged to involve Intermediate Unit staff in a broad range of activities which will result in improved quality of education in the Commonwealth. Because Intermediate Unit staff maintain a broad range of responsibilities in their regions, it is necessary that PDE staff gain the approval of the Executive Director of an Intermediate Unit before Intermediate Unit staff are involved in a PDE sponsored program.

H. The philosophy that Intermediate Units serve in a "linking" role between the school districts and PDE should be encouraged and supported.

The Association of Intermediate Units strongly supports a close working relationship between the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Intermediate Units. Recognition by the PDE that each of the twenty-nine Intermediate Units is a unique organization with varying degrees of expertise and varying staffing patterns with each representing a unique region will lend to a continued fine relationship between the State and these regional organizations.

January 5, 1979

SUMMARY

I believe that it is possible to summarize the emerging ESA/SEA/local school district governance relationships in four brief statements that are a direct result of issue discussed in this presentation.

1. Local school district involvement and interest in educational Service Agency operations will increase.

2. SEA involvement and interest in ESA operations will increase.

3. Federal involvement and interest in ESA operations will increase. There are branches of the federal government who have recently discovered us and have, I believe, arrived at the conclusion that we can help them with many of their goals, in some cases, more so than the State Education Agency or local school district.

4. Because of 1, 2, 3 above, it will be more and more difficult in the future to be "from the middle". It will also be more exciting, more challenging and more rewarding.

Those of us who work in ESAs are working in the only growing educational governance system of the future. It's a great place to be.